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MEMORANDUM

Status of FANK's Infantry Divisions

1. The overall combat effectiveness of FANK's five infantry divisions* -- all of which are currently operating in the Phnom Penh area -- has deteriorated during the past several months, but is not appreciably lower than a year ago. Two of the divisions possess the capability for offensive activity, although the other three are presently suffering from problems severe enough to limit them to manning the defensive perimeter around the capital. Nonetheless, these units should be able to defend the city during the dry season, should the KC launch an offensive against it. The combat effectiveness of each of the five divisions is discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

1st Division

2. The 1st Division -- consisting of the 1st, 48th, and 81st Brigades -- is one of FANK's better divisions, operating along the Bassac River south of Phnom Penh. Its leadership, although not uniformly good at all echelons, is better overall than in the other four divisions. The division commander, Brigadier General Uk Sauv, for example, requires that his brigade

* The divisions are the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th and the recently-created 9th. In addition, FANK has 19 independent infantry brigades which operate throughout Cambodia.

and battalion officers be in forward areas with their units at all times -- a rarity in FANK units. The only serious weakness in the division's leadership is in the 48th Brigade. The presence of a sizable number of Khmer Krom officers has led to open conflicts with ethnic Khmer officers in the division -- reflecting ethnic animosities -- and has undermined morale.

3. The most serious problem facing the 1st Division is the lack of an adequate number of replacement troops. The last recruits -- about 400 -- were received by the division in June. Since then, the division has been allocated virtually no replacements, despite the transfer of a large number of personnel to help create the new 9th Division in July and the heavy casualties sustained by the 1st Brigade on Anlong Chen Island south of Phnom Penh in late August. As a result, the 1st Division's present-for-duty strength as of early October was about 5,000 men -- only slightly more than half of its authorized number.

4. The 81st Brigade probably is in the best condition of any in the division. Although its strength is low, morale is high, leadership is good, and it has been in a defensive position for some time. Consequently, the 81st currently is the most capable of launching limited offensive activity in the Bassac corridor.

2nd Division

5. The 2nd Division is composed of the 2nd, 43rd and 78th Brigades. Along with elements of three other FANK divisions, it has been involved in the clearing operation along the Bassac River, which has been underway for about three months. The division sustained heavy casualties as a result of the operation and only one of its brigades -- the 43rd -- has been able to remain on-line during the operation.

6. The heavy casualties notwithstanding, the absence of effective leadership in virtually all its units has been the dominant factor in the division's lack of effectiveness. Although Brigadier General Dien Del, the division's commander, is a relatively honest and capable officer, he has shown little interest in initiating tactical operations during the past several months. In addition, his brigade commanders

continually have resisted conducting offensive operations. The division's recent tightening of control over ammunition expenditures, coupled with poor leadership and high casualty rates, have seriously lowered morale and effectively destroyed initiative within the division. In contrast to the 1st Division which needs only sufficient replacements, the 2nd also needs considerable qualitative improvements to regenerate its combat effectiveness.

3rd Division

7. Severe manpower problems characterize the 3rd Division, with all three of its brigades -- the 15th, 47th, and 51st -- short of troops. The 15th Brigade, for example, had some 1,000 troops in mid-October -- about 50% of its authorized strength. This resulted from the August fighting along Route 4 in Kompong Speu Province where KC forces inflicted heavy casualties on the brigade. These losses also triggered a high number of desertions. After the fighting, the brigade returned to the southwest sector of the Special Region in mid-August to rest and refit. Although the unit has received some new troops, they have been insufficient to replace all losses. The unit, however, has been able to make extensive improvements in its defensive perimeter, running from Ang Snoul west of Phnom Penh to the Prek Thnaot River.

8. The 51st Brigade also is critically short of troops and experiencing a serious morale problem. The latter was further aggravated in September by restrictions placed on the brigade's planned offensive activity in Takeo Province because of reports -- which were in error, as events demonstrated -- that a large number of KC troops in the northern part of the province were prepared to rally. The 47th Brigade, although numerically stronger than either the 15th and 51st Brigades, also suffers from manpower shortages. The unit sustained only moderate losses in its operations with the 2nd Division along the Bassac River but incurred heavy casualties as a result of an accidental bombing by the Cambodian Air Force in September.

9. On balance, the 3rd Division does not possess the ability to conduct sustained offensive operations in the southwest sector, where all its brigades are located. Nonetheless, the 3rd is expected to hold if the KC launch attacks in its area of operations.

7th Division

10. The 7th Division, comprised almost entirely of Khmer Krom, probably is the best FANK division. Command leadership is good and the strengths of its three brigades -- the 7th, 45th, and 72nd -- are the closest to authorized levels of any of the five divisions. These characteristics, as well as the efficient use of armored vehicles by the division commander (Brigadier General Deng Layom), make the 7th the best mobile fighting unit in the Special Region.

11. In a relative sense, the only serious problem facing the division is with its support units. There is, for example, a serious shortage of trucks. Those which are available are some of the oldest U.S. vehicles in FANK, requiring considerable maintenance. This problem is compounded by a shortage of mechanics in the division's logistics battalion.

12. The 7th and 45th Brigades presently operate in the northwest sector of the Special Region, while the 72nd Brigade is assigned to the Bassac operation. The 7th made consistent progress in the fighting along the Bassac and, in spite of suffering heavy casualties, probably remains the most effective brigade in the division. A major reason is that the unit, as well as the 45th Brigade, has better-than-average leadership. The 72nd Brigade is weaker, both in terms of its leadership and combat experience, although recently it acquitted itself well in fighting.

13. In sum, the 7th Division holds one of the best hopes for aggressive FANK activity during the upcoming dry season. By not having to cope with serious manpower shortages and leadership problems, General Layom has been able to improve the division's artillery support, ammunition security and, equally important, housing for dependents. As a result, morale throughout the division generally is high.

9th Division

14. The 9th Division is a new unit, having been formed last July largely by the transfer of troops from the 1st Division. Presently, the unit has two under-strength operational brigades -- the 36th and 69th -- and a third (the 83rd) is only now being formed. As a result, the division is far below its authorized level of 7,500 troops. Thus far, troop morale reportedly is quite low, aggravated -- perhaps more than in the other divisions -- by declining economic conditions. Additionally, leadership in the division is questionable as it has not yet been seriously tested in combat.

15. The 36th Brigade currently is operating in the northeast sector along Route 5 between Phnom Penh and Kompong Luong, while the 69th is deployed around Phnom Penh and at Kompong Cham. When formed, the 83rd Brigade reportedly will operate west of the capital along Route 4.

Outlook

16. Despite their above noted-deficiencies, the FANK divisions should be able to make some territorial gains around the capital this dry season at the expense of the KC. This assumes the Communists will continue their "provincial strategy," a policy followed since the failure of their offensive against Phnom Penh last January. The strategy calls for attacking provincial towns, severing major lines of communication (including the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers), and keeping government troops in the area of the capital on the defensive. The KC currently do not appear to be planning a major offensive against Phnom Penh itself. Even if the KC switch their approach and attack the capital as they did last January, the divisions should be capable of defending the city.

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